

# OLDER ADULTS AS A TARGET GROUP OF USERS OF GREEN AREAS IN PROJECTS OF THE WARSAW PARTICIPATORY BUDGET

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## Abstract

Urban green areas, ensuring relaxation, contact with nature and social integration, play a key role in the health and well-being of people aged 60+. Older adults are one of the target groups of the Warsaw Participatory Budget (WPB) – a program under which city residents submit and vote for projects that improve the functioning of urban spaces. The study covered projects from 8 editions implemented in the years 2015-2022 in the Śródmieście district inhabited by many people aged 60+. The aim was to determine how often the submitted projects are addressed to these people as a target group in the urban greenery category in relation to other categories, both in the case of projects qualified for voting and winning projects. The results show that out of all 284 projects addressed to older adults qualified for voting, more than half (150) were selected. Among these projects, the urban greenery category accounted for 29.58%, and as much as 71.43% of the winning projects. This indicates the real needs of voters, including a significant need to take action to increase the availability and attractiveness of urban green areas for older adults.

**Key words:** urban green spaces, inclusiveness, age-friendly initiatives, senior age, placemaking

## Introduction

Older adults are a social group with special requirements for the use of public spaces. Due to the potentially large number of architectural barriers and mobility restrictions, they are at risk of exclusion. In Poland, as in the rest of the world, the number of people aged 60+ is steadily growing; at the end of 2021, it amounted to 9.7 million (25.7% of the population). According to the forecast, this number is to increase to 10.8 million in 2030, and to 13.7 million in 2050, which will constitute as much as 40% of the total population. Most senior Poles live in cities and only 28.8% of people from this group assess their physical condition as very good or good, with only 1.4% assessing their physical condition as 'very good' (Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2021 r., 2022). Meanwhile, good health enables independent functioning and increases the possibility of spending time actively outdoors, including in green areas, which brings many benefits. It improves physical and mental health and is the basis of well-being (Bedimo-Rung et al., 2005; Rappe et al., 2006; Van Hoof et al., 2018; Gikwad, Shinde, 2019; Cunningham et al., 2020). Therefore, creating the conditions for active ageing is a global health priority (Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide, 2007).

Warsaw – the capital of Poland – is inhabited by many older adults. In 2021 they accounted for 25% of the population, and a significant number of them live in the Śródmieście district (Rocznik Statystyczny Warszawy, 2022). Walking and resting in green areas are popular forms of activity for people aged 60+ (Jakość życia osób starszych w Polsce, 2020). However, many of these spaces are not friendly enough for older adults, lowering their sense of security (Kimic, Polko, 2021, 2022), and the needs of this social group are often overlooked (Błaszczuk et al., 2019).

The Warsaw Participatory Budget (WPB) is one of the publicly available programs that have been used to support activities aimed at improving the accessibility and attractiveness of the city for its residents since 2014. Through it, they decide on what activities to allocate part of public funds (0.5% of the city's budget of the previous year) – amenities in the immediate vicinity, district or in the entire city. Each edition is based on a fixed scheme: establishing and announcing the rules of the program, submitting projects, verifying them, voting and announcing the winning projects that will be implemented. Older adults are one of the social groups to whom projects can be dedicated.

## Material and methods

The subject of the study are older adults as the target group of the Warsaw Participatory Budget. The aim was to determine how often people aged 60+ are indicated as the main beneficiaries of projects in the **urban greenery** category in relation to the other 8 categories (public space, transport and roads, environmental protection, education, culture, sport, health, social assistance), both in the case of projects qualified for voting and winning projects.

The scope of the study covered projects from eight editions of the WPB implemented in the years 2015-2022 in the Śródmieście district. It concerned all levels of projects: citywide and district projects jointly. The category of **urban greenery**, which involves projects that increase accessibility and ensure relaxation in urban green areas and other spaces related to nature, was considered crucial for improving the psycho-physical health of older adults.

## Results

The analysis of WPB projects addressed to older adults and qualified for voting in the period 2015-2022 for the Śródmieście district (Table 1) shows that, apart from the first edition in 2017, their share remained at a level close to 50% (between 43.30% and 49.12%) in four years (2016-2019). During the covid-19 pandemic and after its end, a significant increase in the share of projects addressed to older adults was observed – close to 90% (between 88.00% and 93.55%) – with a decreasing number of projects. This shows that there is a growing awareness of the need to shape more inclusive urban spaces.

Tab. 1: Projects qualified for voting and winning projects in the Śródmieście district in the 2015-2022 editions of the Warsaw Participatory Budget (Budżet Obywatelski Warszawy. Archiwum wyników, 2023).

Edition	Projects qualified for voting			Winning projects dedicated to older adults	
	Total	Dedicated to older adults		Total	% of qualified for voting
		total	%		
<b>2022</b>	31	29	93,55	17	58,62
<b>2021</b>	50	44	88,00	28	63,64
<b>2020</b>	38	35	92,11	20	57,14
<b>2019</b>	57	28	49,12	22	78,57
<b>2018</b>	92	44	47,83	25	56,82
<b>2017</b>	97	42	43,30	14	33,33
<b>2016</b>	49	24	48,98	13	54,17
<b>2015</b>	50	38	76,00	11	28,95
<b>Total</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>284</b>		<b>150</b>	

With regard to the winning projects dedicated to older adults, these differences are not so significant. After a period of a gradual increase in the first editions (2015-2019), during the covid-19 pandemic and after its end, the share of these projects stabilised at around 60% (between 57.14% and 63.64%). Significant differences can be observed when we link projects addressed to older adults with individual categories. The results show that 29.58% of projects qualified for implementation fall into the **urban greenery** category (Table 2). The number of these projects puts this category in 4th place out of 9 available. **Public space** (61.27%) was ranked first among the categories of projects dedicated to people aged 60+, which results from the specificity of the WPB focused on activities in public spaces. **Education** (42.96%) and **culture** (38.03%) were also popular categories, which in the case of older adults indicates the need to broaden their knowledge and access to cultural events. The degree of association of people aged 60+ with projects in the category of **environmental protection** (22.54%), as well as **transport and roads** (21.13%) was low. The latter result may translate into a limited number of projects aimed at improving accessibility and eliminating architectural barriers from urban roads, thus causing the exclusion of older adults with limited mobility. The degree of linking this social group with projects in the category of **social assistance** and **sport** (13.03%) and **health** (9.51%) is surprisingly low.

Tab. 2: Projects addressed to older adults qualified for voting, divided into categories (Budżet Obywatelski Warszawy. Archiwum wyników, 2023).

Category	Projects qualified for voting	
	Total	% of all qualified for voting (284)
<b>Urban greenery</b>	84	29,58
<b>Environmental protection</b>	64	22,54
<b>Public space</b>	174	61,27
<b>Transport and roads</b>	60	21,13

<b>Sport</b>	37	13,03
<b>Education</b>	122	42,96
<b>Culture</b>	108	38,03
<b>Social welfare</b>	37	13,03
<b>Health</b>	27	9,51

More optimistic in the context of the implementation of measures to improve the accessibility and attractiveness of urban green areas are the results of voting in the analysed editions of the WPB (Table 3).

Tab. 3: Winning projects addressed to older adults in individual categories (Budżet Obywatelski Warszawy. Archiwum wyników, 2023).

Category	Winning projects	
	Total	% of projects qualified for voting in a given category
<b>Urban greenery</b>	60	71,43
<b>Environmental protection</b>	50	78,12
<b>Public space</b>	96	55,17
<b>Transport and roads</b>	35	58,33
<b>Sport</b>	15	40,54
<b>Education</b>	53	43,44
<b>Culture</b>	45	41,66
<b>Social welfare</b>	19	51,35
<b>Health</b>	14	51,85

Projects in the **urban greenery** category were among the most frequently selected of those qualified for voting (71.43%) and ranked just behind those in the **environmental protection** category (78.12%). This proves the real need to improve the functioning of urban areas providing people aged 60+ with contact with nature and rest among greenery. Projects linking older adults with the category of **transport and roads** (58.33%) and **public space** (55.17%) were also often chosen. This confirms the general need to improve the accessibility of these areas and increase the comfort of moving around them for people aged 60+. Slightly more than 50% of the winning projects were in the **social welfare** and **health** categories. The least popular categories were: **education** (43.44%), **culture** (41.66%) and **sport** (40.54%).

### Discussion and Conclusions

The number of older adults in the population of Warsaw is growing (Rocznik Statystyczny Warszawy, 2022), so activities in the field of shaping more inclusive spaces in the city that are tailored to their needs should be increasingly promoted. The Warsaw Participatory Budget is a program that can support this. People aged 60+ are one of the target groups that can be assigned to the submitted projects, but their activity in the WPB is very low (Seniorze - działaj i zmieniaj swoje miasto, 2023). As a result, they have little impact on shaping urban spaces with this tool. Recognising the extent to which both qualified for voting and winning WPB projects are addressed to older adults is the first step to identifying the expectations of these people in terms of shaping urban spaces. The analysis of the winning WPB projects in the **urban greenery** category dedicated to people aged 60+ indicates the increasing importance of activities improving the accessibility and attractiveness of urban green areas for this group of city residents. This observation should be taken into account not only in subsequent editions of WPB, the scope of which is quite limited but also when creating and modernising urban green areas in other programs and activities of municipal authorities. The knowledge obtained from the study may therefore contribute to the direction of social initiatives to create a more age-friendly city.

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## Souhrn

Městská zeleň, která zajišťuje relaxaci, kontakt s přírodou a sociální integraci, hraje klíčovou roli pro zdraví a pohodu lidí ve věku 60+. Starší lidé jsou jednou z cílových skupin varšavského participativního rozpočtu (WPB) - programu, v jehož rámci obyvatelé města předkládají a hlasují pro projekty, které zlepšují fungování městských prostor. Studie zahrnovala projekty z 8 edic realizovaných v letech 2015-2022 ve čtvrti Śródmieście, kterou obývá mnoho lidí ve věku 60+. Cílem bylo zjistit, jak často jsou předkládané projekty v kategorii městská zeleň adresovány těmto lidem jako cílové skupině ve vztahu k ostatním kategoriím, a to jak v případě projektů kvalifikovaných do hlasování, tak v případě vítězných projektů. Z výsledků vyplývá, že ze všech 284 projektů určených starším lidem, které byly kvalifikovány do hlasování, byla vybrána více než polovina (150). Mezi těmito projekty tvořila kategorie městské zeleně 29,58 % a kategorie vítězných projektů dokonce 71,43 %. To svědčí o skutečných potřebách hlasujících, včetně významné potřeby přijmout opatření ke zvýšení dostupnosti a atraktivity městské zeleně pro starší dospělě.

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